I föränderliga och slutna rosa rum
En etnografisk studie av kön, ålder och andlighet
i en svensk waldorfförskola

av

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Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i pedagogik,
som enligt beslut av rektor kommer att försvaras offentligt
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The aim of this study is to generate new knowledge of the educational practice of a pre-school and of how it may contribute to the understanding of doing gender. The ethnographic study examines the place and practice of a Steiner Waldorf pre-school, and it focuses specifically on materiality, age, spirituality and the intentions of the pre-school teachers. Fieldwork has been conducted for a period of one and a half years in one pre-school. The methods used are mainly participant observation and interviews with the pre-school teachers. The results highlight the importance of the material and spatial dimensions of the pre-school for the constitution of children’s gender. The concepts of performativity and ritualization have been used as the main analytical tools. The study draws on the scope of these concepts as understood by Judith Butler and Catherine Bell.

On the basis of the analysis of the empirical material, a theoretical concept, situated decoding of gender, is suggested. It is argued that what at first glance can be interpreted as a ‘female universe’, turns out to be a place where gender is made non-relevant through an unintentional, yet powerful ongoing process of naturalization. The situated decoding of gender is made possible because of certain features in this pre-school. Firstly, a repetitive structure characterizing educational practice has been observed. This is based on a principle of rhythm reciprocally related to the alternations between continuity and change. Secondly, there is a clear spatial and material demarcation that the study argues makes the pre-school an enclosed space, in the sense of being a place of nurturing and protection, where the boundaries between home and pre-school are maintained. Thirdly, the performative force of the ritualized preschool practices further enhances the decoding of gender. The ritualization highlights and supports the spiritual dimension in the pedagogy, which sidelines the doing of gender. Fourthly, the teachers contributed to the decoding of gender through the consistency of their everyday actions.

Keywords: Gender, children, Steiner Waldorf, pre-school, spirituality, rituals, ritualization, performativity, place, decoding.

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